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SUBJECT: ZANZIBAR: HOME GROWN "U.S. ELECTION RALLY" A
SOUNDING BOARD FOR LOCAL THEMES

¶1. On August 31, Muloud Salim, a young, self-appointed Zanzibari "U.S. Election Organizer" held an "Obama for President" Rally in the old fort at the epicenter of the capital of Stonetown. Despite never having been outside of Tanzania, for the last several months Salim has taken it upon himself to try to activate his fellow islanders about the U.S. elections in general and Senator Obama in particular. In his day job as a tour guide for travel agent Abercrombie and Kent, Salim has even gone as far as to carry absentee voter forms that he distributes to unregistered American tourists he sees at the airport (NOTE: Salim's activities are separate and unrelated to voting assistance activities carried out by the Embassy Consular Section. END NOTE). Taxis throughout the island sport either American flags or U.S. partisan stickers because of Salim, and in front of the principal hotel in the capital there is an "Obama tree" decorated with election regalia, that has become something of a tourist attraction in its own right.

¶2. Salim's "rally" brought out about 100 curious locals and around 25 bemused tourists of various nationalities and featured local dancers and music, including a group of transplanted Masai warriors. He paid for use of the venue and PA equipment from small donations by signatories of his petition, a list of about 400 names, about half of them local. At the rally, Salim's speech focused on Senator Obama's African origins, but especially on the campaign slogan "yes we can", suggesting that Zanzibaris could and should initiate their own change.

¶3. At the denouement of his speech, Salim said he was often asked what would be the benefit for Zanzibaris if Obama won. Salim said that Africans should expect little change from the United States post-election, regardless of the outcome, but that was not the real question. He criticized the mentality of those that would ask such a question, saying that positive change would not come from the U.S. or anywhere else outside of Africa. Change had to come from within, and Africans needed to take responsibility for their own problems, he asserted. Salim went on to say that Zanzibar was one people, not two factions, and that Zanzibar was united into one country) Tanzania. Threatening that unity was corruption, which eroded the institutions that would otherwise spur development and unity. Just as Americans were renewing their society with the November election, Zanzibaris needed to watch and learn. When Salim finished speaking, the crowd's echo "Yes we can!" had a different meaning and context from the U.S. electoral campaign.

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